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BRIEFER COMMUNICATIONS

THE COMMITTEE OF FIFTY AND THE INVESTIGATION OF THE LIQUOR PROBLEM.

Some months ago the undersigned was asked to write for the ANNALS a short review of, or an unsigned note on, "The Liquor Problem in its Legislative Aspects," by Frederic H. Wines and John Koren. The member of the editorial committee who made this suggestion was aware that I had expressed the opinion that the gentlemen who prepared this report had not been able to escape as completely as they themselves apparently believed, from the common human frailty of personal bias; and that on this account some deduction should be made from their comparatively favorable presentation of certain legislative schemes and the very damaging presentation of others. The editor did not desire, however, as I afterwards learned, that the review, if unsigned, should contain an expression of opinion, and when the proof was sent for my revision my name was appended. Not understanding the reason for this, and recalling the fact that I had been given the option of writing an unsigned note, I struck out the signature, and stated my personal reasons for not wishing to write a signed review of the book in question. There the matter would naturally have ended by the omission of the note and the preparation of a new review by some one else, except for the accident that the editor in charge of the department was away on his summer's vacation when the proof was returned, and the note was in his absence inserted as amended by the writer. Thus the note was published, contrary to the policy of the ANNALS, containing an expression of the reviewer's opinion, but with no signature.

Without any personal obligation to relate these facts, and in full knowledge that editorial confidences are properly guarded in the office of the ANNALS, I wish, nevertheless, to offer this explanation, and with the permission of the editors to assume the full responsibility for the review. Having done this, I wish to add a few words which seem necessary because of the evidence which has been brought to my notice that the previous note is liable to misinterpretation.

The reviewer did not intend to impugn the good faith either of the committee or of the authors of the report. There appeared to be a certain inconsistency between the generalization of the committee that "it cannot be positively affirmed that any one kind of liquor legislation has been more successful than another in promoting real temperance," and the actual reports presented, which, taken at their face value, do indeed tend to convict all legislative systems of failure, but in very different degrees.

The hope that was expressed in regard to the forthcoming volume on the relations of intemperance to pauperism, now appears to me to have been somewhat out of place in an unsigned note where it could easily be misunderstood. It was, in fact, a perfectly sincere expression of my attitude toward an investigation in which I have the greatest possible interest and which I have personally assisted in some slight degree. From its extent, from the high standing of its sponsors, from the wide co-operation secured, and from the fact that it is in more competent hands than any previous investigation of this kind, if it may not be said to be the first of its kind, the inquiry will certainly produce a volume which will rank high as an authority and which should be of practical value in the treatment of pauperism.

It is possible that a list of the sentences and expressions which appear to me to justify the strictures contained in the note would fail to convince the authors, or even an impartial jury, that the investigators were biased, leading them unconsciously to accept evidence more readily if it tended to confirm previously formed conclusions. It is obvious that it is not the province of the Academy to act as arbiter of any such dispute. Now that those who were inclined to take exception to the note understand that the opinion proceeds from a humble member of the Academy, anxious only, like themselves, to advance our knowledge of the important problem on which they are at work, they will probably hardly think it worth while to enter upon any controversy on these points.

The purpose of this communication is to disavow any imputation of intentional bad faith, to express regret for any expressions which could be construed into personal reflections upon either authors or committee, and to add a tribute of appreciation to the well-deserved praise which their work has received. I do not know that this can be done more effectively than by repeating the words of the former note, that the volume "will probably stand as the beginning of our scientific work in this field."

EDWARD T. DEVINE.

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